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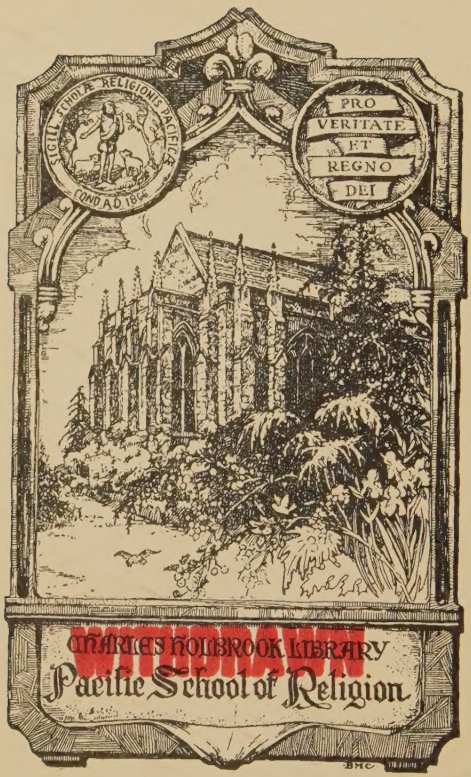

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THE FINDING OF THE CROSS

E. HERMAN

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THE FINDING OF THE CROSS

BY

E. HERMAN

Author of "The Meaning and Value of Mysticism", "Creative Prayer", "The Secret Garden of the Soul", etc.

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THE FINDING OF THE CROSS

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO
I. J. R.
AND
C. E. W.
in Gratitude
M. H.

PREFACE

WHEN these consecutive Lenten studies first appeared in the *Church Times,* it was felt by an ever-increasing number of people who looked to my late wife for light and guidance that they embodied some of her best and ripest thought and were of singular and lasting value, and a desire was expressed in many quarters that they should be issued in permanent form. With the exception of a few minor verbal corrections, they now appear exactly as she left them.

The title, "The Finding of the Cross," is taken from the heading of Chapter VII. I think it may most appropriately stand for the volume as a whole, inasmuch as one of the chief objects of Lent is to help us towards a fresh discovery of the Cross and its implications for daily life, and all the seven chapters treat of the way along which we are to travel in order to reach that goal.

The tributes rendered to my wife reveal that thousands of men and women in many lands have been enlightened in mind and stimulated in heart by a study of her writings, and this book is sent forth in the hope and with the prayer that many more, in all sections of the Church Catholic, may by this her final message—so profound, yet so practical—be helped in their search for spiritual reality and in their endeavour to reach a higher standard of noble and holy living.

My warmest thanks are due to the Editor of the *Church Times* for his kind permission to reprint these studies.

M. Herman.

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THE FINDING OF THE CROSS

CHAPTER I

THE JOY OF PENITENCE

Remember, O man! To the youthful heart, the threshold of Lent is chill with the breath of decay. Ashes for remembrance—with that the reluctant soul enters Lent's grey precincts and prepares for long, sunless days of penitential duty. As the days go on, their steady discipline acts as a bracing tonic, but the first touch of Ash Wednesday is spectral and menacing to many in whom the love of sunshine and laughter is strong. But to those who have lost their first hot grasp upon life, it is not the thought of mortality that makes the call to remembrance unwelcome. For then the sting of memory is not death but sin, and their only fear of Lent is that it may pass without having taught them that art of remembering well which is the A B C of repentance.

I

We know from experience how unsanctifying the remembrance of sin can be, and how

alarmingly its echoes may awaken a whole black cavernful of hurtful emotions. We know the impure passion of remorse that doubles the soul back upon itself in gnawing impotence; the self-torturing shame whose blush leaves a stain; the blighting dejection born of wounded self-esteem; the weary melancholy and sterile regret that drain the spirit; and, at the last, the dull paralysis that follows vainly-spent energies. And so we have, again and again perhaps, run through the whole gamut of self-regarding emotion without having felt penitence or achieved repentance. Begun in unfruitful sorrow, our Lent ended in dull perfunctoriness; and Easter brought a sense of relief, eloquent, not of the joy of the forgiven, but rather of the boredom of the self-disillusioned.

It does not take us long to recognize that the root of our failures in repentance is self-love. It is our self-love that breeds that destructive sadness which contracts the mind and warps the soul. Past acts of indiscretion and folly, committed without malice aforethought, fester into present sins of pride, as they are brooded over by our outraged self-respect. We

seek self-knowledge by peering into our own darkness, instead of holding up our souls to the Divine light, and are vexed but remain uncontrite. We are scorched by ignoble shame, but its fire leaves our meannesses unconsumed. Our defections sting us to self-contempt, but though we bite the dust in humiliation, we come no nearer humility. And knowing that the wound of self-love is likely to bleed again at the slightest touch, and that the tricks of self-love are legion, what reason have we for supposing that this Lent will find us immune from its myriad deceptions?

II

Perhaps the best way of escape is to recall to ourselves wherein true repentance consists and what are the fruits of penitence. That means to think well upon things we have learnt to call commonplaces by reason of our own commonplace apprehension of them. As we realize their depth and height, we shall make our Lenten reading a study of the conceptions of compunction of heart, penitence, penance, and repentance, as we find them in the New Testament especially, and in the great ascetical

writers. (There is no need to disparage small books wholesale; a small book may serve as a gate into a large world of spiritual reality.) And even the simplest study will avail to imprint once more upon our forgetful minds the fundamental truth that repentance is not a self-regarding but a God-regarding activity; that St. Thomas Aquinas was profoundly right when he said that the root of all things is Mercy; and that penitential sorrow is justified by its threefold fruit of joy, vision, and courage.

III

Of these fruits joy seems the most remote—at any rate, in certain moods. Perhaps the ultimate reason for this is that when we think of joy we are accustomed to conceive of it as having its root either in ourselves or in our response to happy circumstances. The case is otherwise with pain and sorrow. Catholic teaching has familiarized us with the idea of vicarious suffering and of participation in sorrows not our own. And even a superficial acquaintance with the mystics takes us a step

further, in showing how the dedicated soul may be caught up into a pain and agony that have their roots, neither in personal emotion, nor in the mysterious movement of suffering sympathy, but solely in the agony of our Lord upon the Cross, which is permitted, as it were, to overflow into the heart that could of itself know no such pain.

The joy born of penitence comes somewhat after the same fashion. It does not well up from the penitent soul; it is not even merely the conscious joy of forgiveness. It flows into the soul from that Fountain of Joy which springs up within angelic hearts, whose source is in the very Being of God. It is part of the unique and unearthly gladness of the angels in heaven over one sinner that repenteth; and it comes only to the soul that is humble and brave enough to seek no joy for herself in the cup of penitential sorrow, but leaves to the citizens of heaven the wine that is salt tears to her own palate.

It is therefore in vain that we try to excite ourselves to joy at penitential seasons. When our Lord looked for friends and neighbours to

rejoice with Him over the sheep that was lost, He could find them no nearer than heaven. The flower of joy that we seek never yet grew on human soil.

Yet we can do something to hasten the coming of that joy. It is a very simple thing, and, perhaps for that very reason, the last thing we think of doing. We are told of St. Jerome that one Christmas night he wished to give a present to the Infant Jesus. First he offered the Lord his works on the Holy Scriptures, then his labours for the conversion of souls, then such virtues of his as he was able to offer. But all this was not what the Lord wanted. "Jerome," He said, "it is thy *sins* I wished for. Give them to Me that I may pardon them."

We too are ready to offer everything but the one thing to our Lord. We show Him our poor efforts, our laborious penances. We are impelled to offer Him our sorrows and disappointments: and that is well. Only our sins we hug to our bosoms, turning them towards ourselves and writhing with shame, instead of turning them towards Him and being humbled by His joy at our confidence. That there is

more real repentance in perfect trust than in any other action is a truth we are very slow to learn.

"The hour of a man's pardon," says Origen, "is a festival-day for Jesus Christ"; and it is when we make a feast-day for our Lord that we first come to know that joy is indeed hidden within the bitterness of penitential sorrow.

IV

The roots of joy lie deepest in the soil of repentance, but it is the fruit of vision that is generally the first to ripen. We have read the stories of the Woman that was a Sinner and of the Penitent Thief so often, and, it must be confessed, so mindlessly, that we have been dulled to their stinging challenge. At the heart of their comforting assurance lies a sting which pricked Jewish self-righteousness and pagan arrogance alike into centuries of venemous retaliation, and still pricks the Pharisee and the pagan that slumber in every human soul. For these stories tell us that the outcast and despised sometimes have what in mean moments we incline to call a "trick" of discerning the Divine Glory, where the respectable and re-

spected can only see the grey homespun of common humanity. A woman who was accounted as the mud of the streets, and accounted herself as such, sees a travel-worn mendicant sitting slighted at a virtuous man's table, and recognizes in Him the world's most illustrious citizen and heaven's centre of adoration, the Divine-Human Saviour-Friend of all who sin and suffer. A dying outlaw of the brutal type looks from his cross of agony at the mangled wreck of manhood on the cross next to him, and sees, through blood and tears, the King Who holds the keys of Paradise. Whence had they, of all mortals, such piercing clarity of spiritual vision? The answer ought to stab us with self-reproach. It was because they saw as we do not see. We see with our minds, or our emotions, or our sentimental or artistic susceptibilities; they saw with the eyes of broken and contrite hearts.

And if we have to deplore a dearth of vision among us, or, more fatal still, an epidemic of spurious vision, it is because the light of penitence burns dim. It is quite easy to have the false vision which the thousand-and-one pseudo-mystical cults encourage. Self-decep-

tion is always fatally easy, and the Devil can counterfeit all gifts and graces except one—the contrite heart. Pharisee and pagan alike are readily captivated by the glory that encircles the brows of false Christs: the contrite soul alone remains unsatisfied until she has seen the print of the nails.

V

As with vision, so with that heroic devotion which makes the saint. We implore God to give saints to His Church in these difficult days. There will be more saints when there are more penitents, and better penitents. We look back upon the early ages of the Church, when her greatest saints were at once her most learned doctors and her most profound penitents. They came from the mire of a decadent paganism, and their conversion was wrought of blood and tears, and born of an agony of penitence that seems remote as an old-world legend to us to-day. We remember the heroic Ages of Faith, and our ears are filled with the weeping of men and women who were penitents before they were saints, and greater penitents as they grew in sainthood. Their tears still bathe the

feet of Christ. Their sorrow was the measure of a love that dared greatly.

The Penitent Thief forgot his agony and the jeers of the crowd in acclaiming his King. He gathered up his dying strength into a confession whose daring we can but vaguely measure. The Woman that was a Sinner brake the box, and its perfume filled the house of contempt and arrogance. The great aureoled penitents of the Christian ages strike shame to our timid hearts by the reckless magnificence of their devotion, the sheer audacity of their love.

We do not break the box of conventional penance and pedestrian duty, because only the fingers of penitential love can shatter its substance. We miss the adventure of the Christian life because we love too little, and we love too little because we see too dimly, and we see so dimly because we are so slow to repent. But as humble penitence grows, the unimaginable love of Christ is revealed. Then love answers Love; the box of self is shattered, and Easter joy breaks through the greyness of Lenten sorrow.

CHAPTER II

THE MYSTERY OF MORTIFICATION

Once more that restless, myriad-faced entity commonly called "the modern mind" is developing a sense of mystery. It has wearied of the clear, thin doctrine of rationalism; sickened of the thick, square religion of positivism; outgrown the crass negations of secularism. Once more it is attempting to launch out into the deep, lured by the mystery at the core of life. And since it confuses depth with unintelligibility and mystery with bombastic vagueness, it lends a ready ear to the pseudo-mystic and to the fluent purveyor of New Thought who offer to hypnotize it "into tune with the Infinite," or to initiate it into the art of swelling itself out into a "super-mind" and mastering all of life there is to master.

I

But if the so-called "modern mind" is once more falling in love with mystery, it is none

the less as much out of love as ever with that region of our mysterious life which is the peculiar domain of mortification. Indeed, it would deny that mortification and mystery have anything in common. The one is the essence of life, the other its flat denial. Frankly, we have little patience with the idea of mortification. To most of us it is part of that dreary infatuation with death, that morbid lust of repression, that underground conspiracy against life itself which we call mediæval asceticism. We have outgrown a religion expressed in negatives. We crave for the positive. We want, not life only, but life more abundant. And in this we think to reproduce the mind of Christ.

And yet, when we look closely at this impressionable age of ours, with its passion for positive, joyous life and its doctrine of untrammelled self-expression, we do not find that it is characterized by that vigour and blitheness which one connects with "life more abundant." Indeed, the devotees of the new cult of life are strangely anæmic and pulseless, and an hour in their company leaves one considerably depressed. The more talk there is about life,

the less of the reality can be traced. The reason is not far to seek. These hectic lovers of life have failed to discover its secret, for they have sought it in life, whereas they should have looked for it in death. At the centre of life is a mystery of death, the secret of the grain of wheat which, except it die, cannot rise to life and bear fruit. That is why mortification, the art of dying daily, so far from being the negation of life, is its indispensable condition.

But mortification *is* negative, we insist, and the soul cannot live on negations. Mortification is cloistered, monastic; and we moderns shrink from the cloister. When we assist at monastic office, what do we hear, the first thing in the morning, when the positive sun pierces the sky and the glad birds shrill their positive note against the stillness?

Now that the daylight fills the sky,
We lift our hearts to God on high,
That He, in all we do or say,
Would keep us free from harm to-day:

Would guard our hearts and tongues from strife;
From anger's din would hide our life;
From all ill sights would turn our eyes;
Would close our ears from vanities.

It is negative from first to last. What if that prayer be answered? What if we *are* kept free from harm that day and saved from certain evils? Will that of itself make us any better? Is the meek and incurious oyster really a nobler creature than the restless and destructive lion?

II

Such reasoning is plausible enough on the surface, but it will not stand the test of reality. Richard Jefferies—by no means an advocate of cloistered virtue—shatters it, *en passant,* with a little parable. He was in the habit of coming out of doors at night to feast his eyes upon a brilliant star which dominated the sky at that particular season. One night he came out as usual, but, though the skies were clear, there was no star to greet him. Puzzled, he stood and looked. Then, suddenly, a light wind stirred a tree, a leaf blew aside, and lo! the star. The moving aside of a little leaf—how barrenly negative! The star, with its mighty suggestion, its thrilling wonder, its subduing awe—how positive!

Or to come closer to human life. A drunk-

ard is induced at last to forswear strong drink. He keeps his promise, and, by dint of a hard struggle, quells the imperious craving. How very negative that is! A man is not necessarily the better for being sober; he may exchange the headlong generosity of the drunkard for the smug self-righteousness of the prig. But what happens? As drink is given up and sobriety restores the broken-down fibre, family affection reappears, daily work becomes interesting, the love of music or of reading reawakens, the spiritual instinct leaps into life. The negative has released the positive; the moving of the leaf has unveiled the star.

III

"Know well," says that master of ascetic wisdom, Thomas à Kempis, "that thou oughtest to lead a dying life." We are slow to believe this, and so we die fatally because we refuse to die. Mortification is not an optional accomplishment, a peculiar achievement belonging to candidates for canonization, or, at any rate, a heroic measure adopted by strenuous Catholics during Lent, to be dropped at the first peal of Easter bells. Or perhaps we concede its

importance, and even necessity, for natures hag-ridden by vices or tortured by passions, for people of hot blood in whom the lust of life runs riot, or people of incontinent ambition in whom the pride of life is rampant. We forget that, more often than not, it only takes a frail leaf to blot out a whole world of light. What of that dissipation of soul that finds so harmless an outlet in quite good-natured talk, and yet bars the way to prayer and recollection as effectually as frivolity or evil-living? What of the constitutional laziness, the general slackness, which issues in nothing more than sinless ease, and yet shuts us out from fellowship with our Crucified Lord as effectually as any vicious habit? What of the love of praise, or the infirmity of purpose, or the weak complaisance, which puts us outside the ranks of Christ's soldiery as completely as theft or drunkenness? We may call these things dead leaves on our tree of life, but it sometimes takes a mighty storm to blow down the leaf that hides a star.

But is not that too much like Jansenism to be safe or wholesome? It would be, if death were the end instead of the means: if we spent

our years in moving leaves that hid no star. But there is a star, and already the leaf trembles.

IV

To-day there is, even in the most unlikely quarters, an increasing interest in Prayer and in the interior life in general. Books on Mysticism and manuals of interior practice are in demand once more. And again and again one meets earnest readers of such literature who are sorrowfully enquiring why they cannot even catch a fleeting glimpse of that land which is the mystic's home. They admit the possibility—the probability, even—of their lacking a vocation for the higher reaches of the interior life; but might they not attain at least to that acquired contemplation which is the birthright of all aspiring souls? They long for the magic, the thrll, the adventure of the life of prayer and communion—why are they kept entirely outside those realms of gold?

The answer is simple, though not easy. Through those realms, from the grey confines to the frontiers of Eternity, there runs the

Purgative Way—the way of mortification. It is trodden plain by the feet of the humble who have attained the Vision Splendid, but prejudice keeps many an earnest soul from walking in it. There are things about that way which appal us. It begins in mortification of the flesh, it proceeds in the mortification of natural impulses, it ends in the mortification of spiritual desires. It is only with the two first elements that we need to reckon in the earlier part of our pilgrimage. The mortification of the flesh does not attract us. We like to say that it is the spirit that needs to be attacked, and that a devil of pride and lovelessness may live within a macerated body. Nor does the mortification of natural impulses appeal to us; for is not nature the creation of God and the "theatre" of His grace?

The question is a large one, and disquisitions have been written on both sides; but two lines of thought may suffice for our Lenten consideration. One is quaintly suggested by the old monastic tag that it is not always advisable to attack the Devil directly; once the Devil sees his cherished companion, the flesh,

harshly treated, he generally runs away. That is a half-truth, but it is well worth setting over against the opposite half-truth—that a devil may dwell in a macerated body. The second is implied in our parable of the star and the leaf. The leaf that hides the star is no evil thing; it is a thing of innocence and natural beauty, yet must fall and decay. And how much more true that would be if the leaf, instead of merely hiding the star, were its sheath or its raw material, as the flesh is the sheath of the spirit and natural impulse the raw material of grace?

And so we come to realize that the mystery of mortification is as the mystery of the star and the leaf, and as the deeper mystery of death and resurrection. The glory of eye and ear and touch, the subtlety of brain, the pulse of emotion, the grace of imagination, the rhythm of impulse—things that belong to the beauty and splendour of natural life—may each be the leaf that hides the star, the husk that imprisons the seed. And when self encloses them in its base grasp, they turn from beauty to terror and from terror to malignity.

A leaf that hides a star? Our self-obsessed nature is a forest that blots out the sun, and the bitter throes of mortification become the birth-pangs of a new and unimaginably radiant life.

CHAPTER III

THE TREASURE OF SILENCE

"When I came into the silent assemblies of God's people," wrote Robert Barclay, the blustering and argumentative Laird of Ury, two centuries ago, "I felt a secret power among them which touched my heart; and, as I gave way unto it, I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up." This was said of a Quaker meeting; it might have been written of a Catholic retreat.

The self-conscious and garrulous nineteenth century saw in silence little more than a commercial and prudential virtue and the necessary habit of the thinker and the artist. Religious silence it regarded as the outworn superstition of monks and nuns. To-day we are rediscovering religious silence, and thousands of simple, practical, everyday people are finding in it, not only a refuge from the din of controversy and the fret of small activities,

but a sanctuary where they hear the voice of God—a place of revelation and healing and power.

I

Few of us use Lent sufficiently as the great opportunity for discovering the hidden treasure of silence. I have been looking through a collection of parochial leaflets giving such simple suggestions for the observance of Lent as the average man and woman can adopt. One feels that the writers of these leaflets were often at a loss to find really practical suggestions. Fasting is all but impossible for the toilers, the sick, and the bitterly poor; vigils are out of the question for the thousands who have to work up to the very limit of their strength; almsgiving can obviously not be practised by all; additional time given to prayer, spiritual reading and devotions is possible for many, but may, in not a few cases, only serve to strengthen the delusion of self-deceived souls who need, not to say more prayers, but to turn from evil and learn to do well. In not one of these papers have I found an allusion to a Lenten discipline which can be practised by all—

the discipline of silence. Everyone can take from his working-day at least twenty minutes, generally given to unnecessary conversation or newspaper reading, and keep silence. And competent instruction in this difficult art, suited to the needs of various types of people, is sorely needed.

For silence is an unexplored country, in which the traveller may easily lose his way. Not a few of us have, in fact, lost our way. We have read certain little books, miscalled mystical, which speak of "going into the silence," and give elaborate instructions for getting there. And, in the end, we have found ourselves in a state of idle day-dreaming, or morbid introspection, or weakening self-hypnotism. Or we have followed the will-o'-the-wisp of "the Christ within," as interpreted by such books, and discovered—or, what is still more fatal, failed to discover—that it was only another name for a subtle form of self-worship. Christian silence is not a piece of amateur psychotherapy; it is a great, practical discipline which makes a highway for God through the wilderness of our disordered thoughts and uncontrolled emotions. It is not an empty space

filled with shadows, or a mirror flinging back our own portrait; it is the response of our whole being to the call of God. In it the soul stands at attention. It is a great stillness, precisely because it is a great activity. Father Baker, writing of this silence at its highest point, compares it to the stillness of the soaring bird. The bird's wings are suspended, motionless; but all the time every muscle is contributing its share to that noiseless cleaving of the air which is at once perfect rest and sustained activity.

II

We often complain that profitable silence is impossible for us. It breeds discomfort and restlessness, or degenerates into "wool-gathering." More often still, it is filled with the buzzing of small distractions. The petty worries and foolish thoughts which are forgotten in the bustle of work or the pleasures of social intercourse loom large and insistent the moment we retire into solitude, and the silence which should be as the stillness of open spaces becomes more narrowing and futile than the most gossipy drawing-room.

One reason for this is obvious. We need not imagine that we can pass at a bound from a daily round, in which talk—and often very small talk indeed—swallows up three-fourths of the soul's energies, to a state of revealing stillness. The practice of silence must begin, not in the quiet half-hour, but in the office, the home, the street, the playground. The soul whose strength has been allowed to ooze from it during eleven hours of the day need not imagine that it would be able to regain it during the one remaining hour. To put it quite plainly, the first step towards the silence that recreates is to hold one's tongue more frequently and to better purpose in the ordinary ways of life. To spend one Lent in preparing the right background for our daily time of silence is doubtless no easy matter, but no one who has tried it will ever regret the labour.

III

What is to be the objective, the particular and definite purpose, of our Lenten silence? Three aims suggest themselves: self-discipline, self-knowledge, and attention to the Presence of God within the soul.

Self-discipline is the most obvious of these aims. We begin Lent with the penitent confession of sin and failure, and the burning question is how to amend. Immediately our thoughts fly to self-improvement. We go over the depressing catalogue of our misdoings, and realize that, while some were due to malice, all have their root in weakness. That weakness may be culpable; it is the result, for the most part, of a relaxed, undisciplined, self-indulgent habit of life. Clearly, the remedy is to "tighten up" our lax fibre, to put the curb upon our untutored impulses. And, if the practice of silence will help us to do that, let us welcome silence, especially since it is a means of self-discipline so easily within our reach.

We remember, perhaps, Thomas Carlyle's praise of silence: "Silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves together, that at length they may emerge full-formed and majestic into the daylight of life, which they are henceforth to rule. . . . Do thou thyself but hold thy tongue for one day, and on the morrow how much clearer are thy purposes and duties; what wreck and rubbish have

these mute workmen within thee swept away when intrusive noises were shut out!" And so we resolve upon the faithful keeping of our daily Lenten silence, in the hope that it will infuse vigour into our feeble purposes, that with braced wills and purged desires we may redeem the wasted years.

All this is very natural, and, up to a point, it "works." The only difficulty is that self-improvement, however laudable, is not Christian repentance, and that the character it produces is, at its best, Protestant and Puritan, and, at its worst, either Pharisaical or pagan. We are called to Lenten discipline, not that we may set about to improve ourselves, but that, by the penitence of love, we may come within the range of God's redeeming and cleansing mercy.

IV

Or, again, we may give ourselves to silence because we feel our need of self-knowledge. If only we had known the weakness and treachery of our hearts, if only we had discerned the trend of our natural propensities, we would not have gone so far astray. Let us, therefore,

in silence, explore our souls that we may be saved from further delusions.

Self-knowledge certainly belongs to our salvation, and for want of it we have suffered shipwreck again and again. Father Faber reminds us that a man needs to keep his heart warm by living in it, and for thousands their own hearts are an arctic region which they are content to leave unexplored. We spend our lives in the world of external things, until one day we wake to the fact that the only life that really matters is the buried life within the soul. Then we sit and look into our hearts, and we sicken as we look. Praiseworthy motives and considerations which we imagined to be most influential in our inner life are seen to be quite superficial and conventional; base motives and considerations which we imagined to be far from us are seen to dominate and tyrannize. Suddenly, and often with stunning force, it becomes apparent to us by what mean and unlovely things we really live. For the first time we drink at the well of self-knowledge, and its waters are very bitter.

They are also very dangerous. To sit silent with one's own intricate and shadow-thridden

heart is not a safe business. It breeds humiliation without necessarily creating humility. It results in vexation of spirit rather than in contrition, in discouragement rather than in repentance. And, in the long run, it may obscure and distort the judgment instead of enlightening it, for a silence that is occupied with self is a breeding-ground of delusions. Self cannot rightly reflect self. "Behold, the Lord is our mirror!" exclaims an early Christian singer: "Open your eyes and see them in Him, and learn the manner of your face." It is only in the light of God that we shall see light.

V

And so we are brought to that deep, inward stillness which is "the silence of the soul that waits for more than man to teach." To cross the threshold of that silence is not easy; it implies that most difficult of achievements —de-occupation with self. Until the obscuring shadow of self has lifted, we must walk among snares and pitfalls. And the veil of self-deception cannot be rent in twain from the bottom upwards; it must be rent from above, and by purer Hands than ours. It is

when we turn from our meanness to God's majesty, when we steep our souls in His glorious attributes and open our hearts to His redeeming love, that we become translucent to ourselves. It is when our silence is filled with the vision of the Crucified that we really know what we are. Then we see our sin as His cross, His crown of thorns, His dark dereliction. We see our meanness and cowardice in His eyes of love, our disloyalty in His smile of welcome, our selfishness in His ministering hands, our reluctance in His hastening feet.

Such silence demands no great intellectual gifts, no high spiritual attainments; but it does demand an unwearied patience and a notable fidelity. Its fruits are often very slow to ripen, its disappointments are intolerable to the impatience of pride. It is to many a greater hardship than fasting, a severer discipline than physical discomfort, a more humiliating process than self-examination. But, sooner or later, and often much sooner than we think, the Voice that cannot be mistaken cleaves the silence, the Touch that cannot be counterfeited falls upon our dullness, and the soul exclaims: "It is the Lord!"

This experience is not the exclusive property of mystics, the prerogative of leisured people, the birthright of the devotional temperament. It is the bush that may burst into flame for the simplest keeper of sheep, the well that may spring up in the desert for the most ignorant Hagar-soul. Books of direction only confuse; nothing is needed but the faith that waits for God, the humility that is not offended at His long tarrying, the fidelity that stands alert through the long night of desolation. The treasure of silence is in very deed the treasure of the humble and the wealth of beggars.

CHAPTER IV

THE GLORY OF PATIENCE

To say that Lent is a school of patience is to suggest to many minds a somewhat colourless virtue—a sturdy bit of grey homespun, decidedly serviceable but hardly attractive: on its positive side, the prudence of men of the world and the wisdom of men of business; on its negative side, a virtue of the cloister. But Christian patience is woven on no earthly loom. No earthly hands hold the shuttle that threads its web with the scarlet of a courage that can spend a lifetime in the trenches and have nerve to spare to go "over the top" at the end; the green of a hope that can live with a mocking past and sing in the face of a threatening future; the blue of a faith that can sit in the dark and see the land that is afar off; the gold of a love that can be broken and trampled into the dust and still remain love.

Such patience is not a copy-book maxim: it rests upon the very Being of God, and to find it we must sink deep into that Being. "God

is patient because He is eternal," says St. Augustine, and until we live in His eternity we cannot know the true meaning of patience. It cannot be learnt from books of ascetic theology; its secret is inaccessible to mere self-discipline. To know it we must look long at Him Who hangs for us upon the Cross with outstretched arms to the world's end; to practise it we must identify ourselves wholeheartedly with the eternal purposes of God. Tertullian knew something of this when he said that "patience protects the whole will of God in man." The practice of every Christian virtue brings us near to God, but to practise patience is to become intimate and colloquial with our Creator. "Whosoever keeps the rule of patience takes God for his novice-master."

And if the discovery of patience is a wonderful adventure of the spirit, its practice, so far from being a dreary, pedestrian exercise, must be the most heroic of activities and test the hardness of the Christian soldier to its breaking-point. Lent offers us an unparalleled opportunity for testing and consolidating patience at its very centre—patience with ourselves, and with God, in the spiritual life.

I

It is a commonplace to say that the observance of Lent, if it is not a mere formality, must sooner or later reveal to us how very shallow and brittle our spirituality really is. Before we have got to mid-Lent our little self-denials become a weariness, our additional devotions are an awkward burden, our self-restraints seem empty of meaning. And all this is only symptomatic of a deeper evil. The truth of the matter is that our penitence has worn thin, and our Lenten ideal has been dimmed in consequence. At best, habit has usurped the place that belongs to grace. Already, we think we may have done enough in the way of strictness, forgetting St. Augustine's warning: "If thou sayest, It is enough! thou hast perished." Soon, unless we pull ourselves together, we shall once more be content to steer by moral theology—that manual of first-aid for desperate sinners—we, who have had a vision of Christian perfection!

It is at this point that we read in some spiritual book—probably excellent in itself, but not in the least applicable to our own case—that

the great thing at such a time is to be patient with oneself. It is no use getting angry because one has failed to stick to one's Lenten rule, or, at any rate, failed to observe it in the spirit as well as in the letter. Perhaps the rule was too hard, and it is true humility to acknowledge it, and to try and get the rule modified. In any case, it is no use scolding oneself: the thing is to go on as best one can, and to remember that God is not a hard taskmaster, but knows and compassionates our weakness.

All this is sound advice for the few; to most of us it is rank poison. Patience with ourselves does not spell self-indulgence. Its long-suffering lies rather in unweariedly recalling the recalcitrant self to its first heroic purpose, setting before it high views of honour and valour in the service of God. Patience has no use for that miserable casuistry which masquerades as ascetic wisdom. It is not an advocate of mediocrity. "There are no short roads to perfection," says Cardinal Newman, "but there are sure ones"; and the surest way is not the way of concessions and dispensations. True, we must be patient with ourselves, but not at the cost of being impatient of our standard.

Genuine patience with self means the calm, steadfast, relentless upholding of that standard in the face of repeated failures.

II

The first work of patience is to renew and deepen penitence. If God is indeed tender and compassionate to our frailty, such compassion should create and renew a contrite heart within us. We must be penitent before we have any right to try to be heroic, and nothing short of the patience that refuses to yield to allegations of weariness and incapacity, but keeps us fixed in the contemplation of the Everlasting Mercy, will make and keep us penitent. For some of us this will mean resort to our crucifix—that wonderful compendium of both ascetic, and mystical theology, at once the only textbook of unlettered saints and the *vade mecum* of learned doctors. To look long and patiently at our crucified God, to keep on looking though our eyes remain hard and tearless, to keep on pondering though our hearts be dull and irresponsive, to keep on adoring though without a single throb of emotion—*that* is to have patience with ourselves. How much of this

"dry" adoration, persisted in against every protest of flesh and blood and against every argument of the inferior reason, has gone to produce that seraphic fervour in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, and the Eucharistic life that flows from such fervour, which we imagine to be the expression of inborn religious genius, the exclusive property of a handful of saints! It may come as a surprise to us on the Last Day to find ourselves reproved for lacking some grace which we had imagined to be a gift to a few elect souls, but which lay well within the reach of our patience. How much more can patience bring to us God's universal gift of penitence!

We constantly repeat the stupid *cliché* of a certain school that this age is not an age of penitence, because the modern mind is incapable of that great, tragic emotion called "a sense of sin." It takes no particular type of mind, and certainly no "great, tragic emotion," to make penitents. All we need is the patience to face the facts of sin and forgiveness, the patience to lay aside our interesting little books and our absorbing little occupations and to rivet our minds resolutely to unfamiliar and

uninviting realities until we are subjugated by them. It is simply a matter of persevering response to grace; it is simply the patience of man giving the patience of God its chance. Our hearts are not made of different stuff from the hearts of the saints; the difference between us and the saints is that they held their hearts still and gave them to be broken. And that means patience, for the grace of God has a slow stride, and the broken and contrite heart is not attained by a Coué formula.

III

And having renewed our penitence, patience will re-create our heroism. It may be that the Lenten rule we have decided upon *was* too ambitious and needs to be modified, but that is not very likely in these valetudinarian days. To judge by certain popular writers, it might be supposed that the average Catholic of to-day was in the habit of scourging himself with a contraption of razor-blades, like Father William Doyle; but few spiritual directors have ever met those formidable ascetics. In nine cases out of ten, it is not our rule but ourselves that need "re-editing." Our rule consists of

small self-denials, of little acts of mortification, of apparently negligible religious obligations, and yet we find their repetition irksome. God hides Himself; we "don't feel like it"; the Lenten days stretch before us like a dreary grey road without a turning. But if we can hold ourselves to it, if we can remember that "feelings" count for nothing in the spiritual life, if we can steadfastly resolve to do as much for a hidden God as for a God Who reveals Himself to us, we shall, by the time Lent ends, have mastered the fundamental principle of the heroic life and be on the way to saintship.

We say that this needs patience, and again we think of patience as a humdrum virtue. It needs one particular kind of patience, the patience that springs, not from a prudential brain or a disciplined soul, but from the very heart of God Himself. Here, where the spiritual life seems at its dullest, is the very romance of spirituality. Human hearts everywhere and in all ages have been thrilled by stories of chivalrous love—love that asks for no return, that counts no service too lowly, that assumes the guise of a page or a kitchen-maid to be near its beloved; content to be unnoticed, scorned,

abused; content to die without being recognized, or winning a flicker of response from the adored. Yet, when this great love-adventure comes to us in the spiritual realm, we vote it dull and futile. We are slow to recognize in Christian patience the interpreter of love's sublimest mysteries, the guide to love's supreme adventure. And so we modify our tiresome rule and curtail our "dry" prayers, are content with a defective penitence, and relinquish heroic aspirations, imagining all the time that we are imitators of St. Francis de Sales in being patient with ourselves. And, in the end, we have made another stride in the fatal art of self-deception, and have not become more patient with others or more sympathetic with *their* lapses from the heroic ideal.

IV

It all comes back to this. God, Who never wearies of a human soul, is asking, asking again, asking continually, the same things of us—little things or big things, as the case may be, but asking still. Our lack of response does not weary Him, our failures do not discourage Him, our defections do not chill Him. He

comes to us on the Cross. He says one thing to one of us and another thing to another, but to each of us He says: "Give Me *all,* and I will make you a saint." That is the great fact at the back of Lent. Almighty God, strong and patient, is asking something of us. If He did not ask, our Lenten self-denials would be a sheer impertinence; as long as He asks, our fictitious patience with self in falling short of His demands is an insult. If our Lenten observance means an unrelenting daily fidelity to a distasteful rule, in the teeth of dullness and "dryness," and in penitent and patient response to the demands of God, we need not worry about the "greyness" of it all. What is grey to our eyes is gold in the vision of angels.

I once heard a Lent preacher try to encourage the faithful with the reminder that it was at midnight, when things looked darkest, that Christ was born. But patience does not break at midnight, even though not so much as one star show in the sky. *"It was midnight, and Jesus was not yet come unto them."* There would have been a dramatic fitness in the coming of Jesus to His disciples at the blackest hour of the night. But God is not dramatic;

neither is life. Jesus came "at the fourth watch," at the most bleak, weary, unpropitious time, the hour of lassitude and disillusionment; and even then He would have passed by—the numb lips of chilled and fear-worn men had to hail Him. Patience, however heroic, fails if it is not patience with God as well as with ourselves and others. The patience that cannot watch for Jesus until the "fourth watch," and then turn to Him across the waters of disappointment, not querulously, but, as Tertullian has it, "with pure brow, free from sadness and irritation, with peaceful eyes, with a mouth sealed with discretion," has not yet "had her perfect work." It is precisely in the slow, commonplace discipline of Lent that patience is tempered to its highest uses, and girded for that great night whose dawning means the soul's encounter with God. That is why the Lenten adventure is worth our most toilsome effort, our most heroic endurance.

CHAPTER V

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THOUGHT

A LADY who was by way of being a Catholic had listened to a sermon upon the duty of using one's brains in religion, in the course of which the preacher had enlarged upon the sanctity of thought. The lady was not edified. "Thinking," she observed, "is so—so very *Protestant*": a dictum which deserves to be put by the side of the curious opinion, held by not a few among us, that thinking is a specifically Catholic process, and was first introduced into the world by St. Thomas Aquinas. As a matter of fact, every Catholic who takes his daily meditation seriously is thereby committed to teach himself to think, and to think about the most profound matters that can occupy the human mind. It is not without significance that a Roman manual of meditation, very popular a generation ago, bore the homely title, "Think Well On't." Very few of the little books which seek to teach "meditation without

tears" to present-day Catholics could sustain such a title—there is not very much in them that will bear thinking "well" on. Our writers have largely caught the trick of the Psychological School—the fatal art of "thinking with the imagination," of substituting impressions, *aperçus,* moods and tenses of the superficial brain, for genuine thought. The aim has been to attract simple people; but, in most cases, they have only attracted the lazy, who are usually very complex persons indeed.

I

Whatever be our way of observing Lent, there can be few who have not proposed to themselves a simple course of meditation; and meditation involves reading, since very few can make their meditation without books. Nothing could be simpler than to determine upon a course of meditation; nothing can—and often does—prove more difficult and barren. The question of method crops up at the very outset, and we spend much time in trying to force ourselves into moulds into which we were not meant to fit; or else we cheerfully shelve all methods and rely upon the inspiration that

never comes. In the end, we often fall into one of two traps: we either descend to vaguely pious musing, sentimental or speculative, as our native bent may be; or we settle down to a course of dry study, very useful in its way and an excellent discipline, but a most effectual preventive of meditation. We either do not think at all, or, if we do, our thought is not transfigured. We muse, but the fire does not burn. We drag along the ground without gaining even the sense of solidity which contact with the earth can give.

Perhaps the surest way out of the difficulty is to begin by making it quite clear to ourselves what meditation really is, and what it is intended to effect.

II

Meditation is to think of Divine things with a certain end in view. That end is generally defined as being the application of these things to the details of our daily conduct. As a consequence, we spend most of the time allotted in drawing "practical lessons" and framing resolutions. That is very admirable; it is also, more often than not, very mechanical and

wooden. Our Modernist friends would tell us that it is very Jewish, very "Old Testament"; but if the hundred-and-nineteenth Psalm is typical, it is not at all "Old Testament." "I am as glad of Thy Word: as one that findeth great spoils." "Thy testimonies have I claimed as my heritage for ever: and why? They are the very joy of my heart." "Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them." Discovery, joy, wonder—how many of the meditations we like to call "practical" evoke these things in us? And it is by discovery, joy, and wonder that our mind expands and our heart is ennobled. We treat them as luxuries, and call our poor moralizings our daily bread. But here also man does not live by bread alone, and the most truly practical things are those we choose to call luxuries.

Supposing, then, we amend our definition and say that to meditate means to think of Divine things in such a way as *to get to love them?* Love rejoices, wonders, makes discoveries; and love is the most practical thing in the world, for it is the fulfilment of the law.

At its best, such meditation is comprehen-

sive and systematic. It takes the whole universe of Grace for its province. It is to be regretted that there are so few books that can take their place beside Bellord's *Meditations on Christian Dogma.* Doctrine still repels the average lay person, who regards theology as the esoteric amusement of a few learned people; and we are waiting for the spiritual writer who can make the great formative principles of our religion to *live* for the ordinary man or, rather, who can show them to be fibres of the tree of life. Meditation on doctrine is inevitably difficult, and even dry, in its initial stages; but it is dry as practising scales is dry: sooner or later the "notes" of dogma will weave themselves into spiritual music. To meditate upon Catholic teaching concerning God, man, sin, judgment, grace, salvation, the Sacraments, and so forth, is slowly but surely to enter upon a new world of wonder and beauty. The road to that new world may be wearisome, but it is only the road, and roads have an end.

III

We are sometimes told that the trouble with intellectual or doctrinal meditation is that it

all ends in preaching a little sermon to oneself. Well, why not? It is the most profound and sincere kind of preaching. It is when a man has expounded to himself the entire system of Christian doctrine, or the life and teaching of our Lord, that he has found the master-key to meditation. But does this not resolve itself into a matter of reasoning? Yes, sometimes; and it was while two disciples reasoned that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But does not such intellectual enquiry kill the spirit of reverent awe and wonder? It may; yet the Psalmist prayed: *"Open Thou mine eyes,* that I may see the wondrous things of Thy law." Wonder is not the child of ignorance; it is the Christian reason irradiated and active. There is nothing more saddening than to observe the decline of wonder in the Catholic Church. Converts enter it in the first flush of untutored wonder. They live in a whirl of joyous amazement, and their frank enthusiasm is smilingly regarded by older Catholics as one of the *gaucheries* of the spiritually *nouveaux riches.* But, sooner or later, the wonder wears thin, because it was sown in the shallow soil of emotion and sentiment; it had no root in

the mind. A course of systematic instruction or self-instruction might have prevented this.

IV

Lent is, indeed, a time of self-instruction—a time for doing intellectual "five-finger exercises," if you like—for both new and old Catholics. If we gave ourselves to systematic meditation even for a few weeks, we would be surprised to discover how feeble our hold upon fundamental principles has been, and how badly we lacked orientation in our spiritual geography.

A priest, arguing against the invocation of saints, has said that, in his experience, people who prayed to the saints found their belief slip away from them in time—probably at an hour of crisis—and were left with their faith in God shaken. That is undoubtedly true to fact, but one cannot accept it as a valid argument against invoking the saints. The trouble is that these people start with a non-Catholic conception of God, and then attach to that conception a sentimental belief in the intercession of the saints because it appeals to them as a very comforting doctrine. It is the super-

imposing of an "eccentric" patch upon an alien fabric, the tying of apples to a young plum tree. At the first strain on the fabric, the patch tears loose and leaves a gaping hole; at the first gust of wind, the apples are blown down and the branches of the tree broken. In such cases, the faith of the persons concerned has never been welded into one whole; it has remained unarticulated—a mere agglomeration of separate beliefs which do not follow from central principles by the laws of an inexorable dialectic. The remedy is to be found in an honest endeavour to "think through" one's faith, a task in which the "simple shepherd" may outstrip the "wise man."

V

But it remains none the less true that for some people anything like systematic meditation is an impossibility, either by reason of temperamental make-up or from lack of early training. This is where spiritual freedom comes in. Such souls should not force themselves into the groove of any method, however approved, but remember St. Paul's go-as-you-please prescription: "Whatsoever things are

true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." It may be, also, that these undrilled spirits are particularly sensitive to inner guidance; and those who feel inclined to criticize their "looseness" and "subjectivity" would do well to remember that St. Ignatius—that master of strictly ordered meditation—bids us drop our plan and our points on the spot whenever we are conscious of the Holy Spirit's leading, and follow that guidance whithersoever it may take us.

Such souls will find their solid sustenance in spiritual reading. We shall do well to remember here that meditation, as we know it to-day, is a late institution. It is, in fact, the result of the increasing hurry of life: an effort to compress into half an hour, or even a quarter of an hour, all those movements of the soul which an early spirituality spread over half a lifetime. In this earlier—and sounder—spirituality, the *lectio divina,* the reading of the things of God, occupied a central position.

Men trained in the Benedictine or Carthusian schools did not hurry to make their spiritual offering to God before they had received the material from Him. They read widely and deeply, and their meditation followed naturally from their reading. When they came to anything that attracted them, they stopped and exploited that vein of gold. That is meditation at its best—natural and unprepared. The soul comes into contact with truth, and is illuminated and kindled. For many of us, nothing short of the strict Ignatian discipline is needed; but it is those whom, for convenience, one may call Benedictine spirits who know "that wondering joy which flows from the clear sight of truth"—St. Augustine's *gaudium de veritate.*

VI

And the end of both ways is the same—to meet with God, to see light in His light, to give Him love for love, to respond to grace, to hear the call of Christ and obey it. It is all very simple and familiar—and difficult, as simple and familiar things are difficult. It means the forming of a new mind

within us, it means the expulsive power of a new affection; and those who have much to part with know how that expulsive power can hurt to the point of anguish.

There is, first, mental discipline, dry and hard. Then wonder is born, and the soul glows and thrills with the joy of discovery. Then love grows; and love brings, not peace, but a sword. One cannot take time to be alone and think well upon Divine things without meeting the Cross. What is begun in quiet musing ends in sharp conflict of spirit. Divine Love confronts us with its disconcerting challenge, its stern exactions. We wrestle with the angel in the darkness, and we never walk with even step again. But it is worth it all. And one hard, dreary Lent that brings us to that night is better than many lightly-won Eastertides.

CHAPTER VI

THE ADVENTURE OF ENDURANCE

We often hear it said that, while genius is rare, patient plodding is—thank God!—common enough. That, however, is not strictly true. Genius may be rare, but really faithful plodding—not the soulless grind of the *routinier,* but that well-nigh omnipotent quality called staying-power—is almost as rare in its full perfection. Staying-power is, indeed, itself a kind of genius. It is not dull, dogged persistence; it is the magic art of going through a lifetime of monotonous work and remaining an artist, not a mechanic. To persevere in grey drudgery and become as grey as one's work in the process is fatally easy. Circumstances compel most of us to persevere in our humdrum tasks, but the great question is *how* we persevere, and what we are like after ten, or twenty, or thirty years of perseverance?

For endurance is a word that may cover

many conditions. It may mean the failure of the mother who begins as a noble woman and ends as a sour drudge; or it may mean the triumph of the mother whose heart can be broken and still remain a heart of love. It may mean the sober virtue of the priest who, through years of unrequited toil and apparently barren effort, does his duty faithfully, but with a dull, disillusioned heart; or it may mean the radiant faith of the priest who, after a lifetime of unrelieved disappointment and outward failure, can still see visions and dream dreams. It may be a hard servitude; it should be a glorious adventure.

I

From the earliest days of the Church there have been two distinct types of spirituality, which, by a convenient anachronism, we may call the Benedictine and the Ignatian. Long before St. Ignatius had founded his unique Society and imposed upon a world nurtured upon simpler diet that heroic, but somewhat sophisticated, system of holiness of which the famous *Exercises* are merely a shorthand abstract, there were men and women who found

their very life in multiplying verbal devotions, acts and inspirations, and who conceived saint-hood as the doing of an endless number of little things supremely well. When St. Ignatius enforced his two great maxims, *Agere contra in omnibus* and *communia non communiter,* upon his disciples, he was only crystallizing the spiritual philosophy of thousands before him who had spent their days in that "acting against" (*i.e.,* nature and inclination) which gives to the humblest daily routine the dignity of a great religious discipline, and whose one ambition was to do common things, and the smallest of common things, in a quite uncommonly perfect way. (This spirituality, in which the will plays the leading part, has always been a great school for saints, and has always attracted one type as much as it has repelled another.) To souls which may loosely be described as Benedictine, it seems pedestrian, cramping, legalistic—producing an asphyxiating atmosphere in which the spirit cannot breathe. Such souls love the broad way of quiet surrender to God, feeling that it is not preoccupation with the details of an ascetic system but a lifting of the eyes to

the eternal hills that makes for perfection. They are repelled by the scrupulous multiplication of small duties, irritated by the *minutiæ* of formal devotions. They live in the clear, tender light which surrounds the soul that is calmly set upon its supreme Object, walking in the glorious freedom of the sons of God—strong alike to suffer and to enjoy. And yet, between these two divergent types, there is a common bond. Both live by sheer staying-power, and both are bent upon adventure—the adventure of faithful, unremitting endurance.

In one of his famous *Spiritual Conferences,* Father Faber says some very plain things about the monotony of piety: "I will freely confess that I know nothing in the world to which I can compare for monotony the occasional drag of a pious life except either being detained at a country inn during a hopelessly wet day, or else driving in a gig, and for a long stage, a tired horse which is on the collar the whole way."

Who has not felt the wearing monotony of the Christian life? And how often we would be glad if the monotony were merely

wearing, and not irritating and humiliating as well! The soul of large horizons, quietly fixed upon God, feels it no less than its brother-soul immersed in the details of holy living. Indeed, it often feels it more acutely, for there come times when, to quote Father Faber once more, "God Himself becomes dull to us. He is uninteresting, undemonstrative." What monotony in any human activity can compare to that of prayer persevered in against feelings of utter distaste and repugnance?

There is the inescapable monotony due to the fixity of character and circumstance. All night we toil hard on the lake and take nothing, and it is always the same, every night—the same old net, the same old pond. The temptations which conquered us yesterday, the old trials and pitfalls which humiliated us time after time have to be faced again to-day, and to-morrow, and every day. True, at the end of any night's fruitless toil on the lake, we may hear the voice of the Master bidding us cast our nets to the right side of the ship, and find ourselves, in the golden morning, hauling in a "great draught" of reward. But

meanwhile the succession of fruitless nights is eating into our very fibre, and we are glutted with the bitter experience that worketh anything but hope.

And we succumb to tiredness. Grace seems to have ebbed out from the shore of life, and, while we still endeavour to do our first works, we cannot keep our first love from slipping away. We fall into the dreary habit of doing good things badly. We get out of heart with our spiritual duties, and soon the effect is seen in a slipshod life. We have not ceased to do well, but we are weary in well-doing; and that is a desolating business. The path through the meadow has ended in a hard, grey road, just when we were getting tired. A hard, grey road and weary feet make rough going.

Again, the loneliness of the struggle often dismays us. It takes so little to chill us with a sense of loneliness. If we are sensitive, the lift of a critical eyebrow at the "superstition" and "fanaticism" of our Lenten practice sometimes suffices to breed a consciousness of isolation. And to more robust souls there inevitably comes a time when loneliness falls

upon them like a pall. We realize, sooner or later, that we cannot pray or become saints in gangs; that we were not made for each other, but for God. And our loneliness is most afflicting, perhaps, when the heart's cry for human sympathy is met with well-meaning inadequacy. (The loneliest moments of the Son of God, we imagine, were not on the mountain-top alone with God, nor among the crowd that misunderstood Him, but surrounded by the weak love and dull-eyed sympathy of His disciples. And, in whatever way it seizes us, the loneliness of the spiritual life wears endurance thin, and empties the heart of courage.)

II

To preach endurance at such times is to preach a bleak doctrine indeed; not because endurance is a bleak virtue, but because it is an adventure in the dark. Yet we know that countless souls have come to their birthright of radiance and triumph simply by "keeping on," weary hour after weary hour, dull day after dull day, grey year after grey year. In the Life of Father William Doyle we are

given the spiritual diary of a radiant soul that lived on the dry bread of endurance. Father Doyle knew himself called by our Lord to a life of the most heroic self-abnegation in little things, a life barren of even the most innocent comforts and gratifications. He loathed the very idea of such a life, his delicate health provided him with ample excuses for not living it, his fastidious tastes made it a torture. Yet he resolutely and perseveringly set himself to live it, failing every now and then, quietly punishing himself for his failure, and starting again. He never "felt like it," but feelings did not count in his religion; so he got out of bed to pray when he longed for sleep, went without sugar when he craved it, chose the most distasteful food, the hardest seat, the most uncongenial occupation, when every fibre of his nature shrieked a protest. He had had a vision of the life God asked of him; the rest was sheer, dull, dogged staying-power. It was a great adventure—how great only those souls to whom he brought strength and healing, and the fighting men who learnt to love him with an idolizing love on the tragic fields of

France, can measure, and even they quite inadequately.

Or to turn to the example of one who was neither an ascetic nor a saint—Robert Louis Stevenson. Writing to George Meredith, this brave adventurer says: "For fourteen years I have not had a day's real health. I have wakened sick and gone to bed weary; and I have done my work unflinchingly. I have written in bed and written out of it, written in hæmorrhages, written in sickness, written torn by coughing, written when my head swam for weakness. And the battle goes on—ill or well is a trifle."

Endurance is not a prosaic business at the heart of it. It is the secret of all romance, as well as the seal of sanctity. It is not the craftsmanship of the lamp that matters, when the Bridegroom comes late in the drowsy hours of the night: it is the oil that feeds the light. It is the oil of loyalty in the lamp of love that makes it a starry passion and not a sensual gratification. It is the oil of faithfulness in the lamp of faith that makes it a spiritual discipline and not a neurotic sentiment. It is the oil of habit in the lamp

of vision that makes it an enduring light and not a will-o'-the-wisp. We all have moments of vision, hours of insight; but it is not until what we have seen and felt at such times is "worn in" by habits of prayer and duty that it becomes vital and victorious. It is the goodness that lasts, the love that is faithful, the devotion that is habitual, which makes all the difference between a religion of sentiment ending in moral collapse and a religion of grace leading to spiritual transfiguration —between a glorious adventure and a narcotic hallucination.

III

Nor need we wait for the end of endurance to see the golden glory within the grey. "I am almost inclined to believe," says a recent writer, "that it is the level land that is loved the best, land that has no beauty in itself, but only what it borrows from the clouds and the mists, the night and the morning. The reason Corot painted a tree as perhaps no other man has painted it was because he understood, in a special sense, the value of atmosphere, and this value is too often lost

in the beauty-spots of the world, where our eyes are so held that we miss, as it were, the soul of the picture. But it is not possible to miss the soul in the level country, where, there being nothing to break the line of vision, the earth takes unto itself some of the characteristics of water by acting as a reflection of our moods. . . . The greatest writers and thinkers have been born in the level lands."*

And so it is with the long, low, grey level of endurance. When we get down to that level, the elations and thrills and enjoyments of the naturally religious soul have been left behind. Our landscape is now bare of interesting or romantic features. We are alone in the wilderness—with God. There our only music is the tramp of our weary feet, our only beauty the still atmosphere and the overbrooding sky. Yet the wilderness is cramped with wonder. To say wilderness is to say miracle. Its sands are white with manna, its rocks glistening with living water. "Out of the wilderness a gift," as the inspired song has it.

And the name of that gift is joy. That is

* E. M. Martin, *Wayside Wisdom*, pp. 65-66.

the great adventure of endurance—the birth of joy in the dark. On the hill-tops of life we work that we may play with a clear conscience when work is done. In the wilderness it is all work; but, as we toil, there exudes from our work a wonderful liquor, a rare elixir, the sap of an invincible joy. (More than one saint has told us that it is not until we are feeling utterly bored with our prayers, and still pray on, that we can know the power and joy of prayer.) It is not until we have worked and endured through half a long, dragging day, endured when we felt utterly dreary and heart-sick and tired to exhaustion, that we begin to know the meaning of spiritual joy. That is not a theory; it is a fact, corroborated by the great army of those who have endured to the end, from St. Francis of Assisi down to the bed-ridden pauper woman whose only complaint was that she could not sing when she felt so much like singing for sheer joy and gratitude.

It is a paradox—part of that greater paradox we call the joy of our Lord. Having endured to the end, He bequeathed to the

Church His joy. And still that joy, hidden from the impatient egoist, eluding the religious sentimentalist, denied to the volatile impressionist, wells up in the heart that knows how to endure.

CHAPTER VII

THE FINDING OF THE CROSS

It is a great day in a man's life when—perhaps in the midst of a crowded street, perhaps in the stillness of a secluded sanctuary—he is arrested, held, enfolded by a Power not himself, and a voice speaks deep within his heart, "Behold, Jesus Christ!" Of such a moment Lacordaire says that "he who has not known it has not known man's true life."

But to meet Jesus Christ is to find the Cross. We do not always make the discovery at once. Our first encounter may be with the Divine Teacher of Galilee, or with the risen Son of God; or Jesus may show Himself to us as He showed Himself to the disciples, "in another form"—in some secret and incommunicable manifestation, intensely individual, irresistibly convincing, part of the soul's inalienable secret. But however radiant and exhilarating our first sight of Jesus Christ

may be, the moment will come when we shall meet Him as His blessed Mother did—bearing His Cross.

That moment will be one of sharp revelation. To read of the Cross and of all it implies is one thing; to meet Jesus bearing His Cross, or to stand with the sorrowful Mother at the foot of that Cross, is quite another. Up till then the Cross had been a comforting fact, taken on faith; now it becomes a piercing challenge, a question that calls for an immediate answer. It is no longer something to be meditated upon; it is something to be accepted, something to be borne. A penetrative thinker has said that we cannot love Jesus with impunity. We certainly cannot meet the Cross with impunity. Whether we accept it or shirk it, the encounter leaves a wound.

I

But why this challenge and this pain? we are tempted to ask. Is there not enough suffering in the world, not enough sorrow, even in a happy human life, that we should need to find it in our religion? Is not

religion meant to comfort, to heal, to restore, to transfigure life into a radiant, joyous thing?

The answer lies in the very words that our shallow, joy-craving hearts constantly urge against the doctrine of the Cross. Love, we say, is the greatest thing in the world, and God is love. Love does not smite, it heals. Yes: the one thing in the universe that can give comfort and happiness is love—and to say "love" is to say "suffering"; to say "love" is to say "Christ crucified"; to say "love" is to say "I am crucified with Christ." Where on earth or in heaven is there a love that does not live by pain, sorrow and sacrifice? If we really want to argue successfully against the element of suffering in religion, we must first argue love out of the universe. In a loveless world created by a loveless God, suffering would be an insult, an outrage, sheer folly. In a world created and redeemed by Love, suffering is a glorious vocation, a Divine energy, the very stuff of joy. But for suffering, sin would end in despair, and doubt in madness.

We speak of the problem of suffering.

There *is* a problem of suffering. But as we look more deeply and steadily into its inexorable face, we come to know that, whatever problems it may propound to us, suffering is itself the solution of the world's most crucial problem—God's own answer to the question of the ages. It is the answer of Redemption —God's great answering Act, in a situation which no mere argument can meet. We are beaten and bruised, and words have no power to heal us. But by His stripes we are healed —Pain answering pain, Agony interpreting agony, Death refuting death. We may quarrel with it all, if we will; but, in order to be consistent, we would need to quarrel also with the mother-love that gives its heart to be broken, and the hero-passion that sheds its blood for home and country. Given the fact of sin, the only world in which voluntary suffering is a superfluity is a world from which love has been wiped out. When God Himself wanted to redeem a sinful world, He could only die for it. When Christ came into that world, He could only conquer it by giving Himself for it. When the Church was established upon earth, she had to be "born

crucified." The Cross runs all through life. If we cannot attain to joy through it, we must resign ourselves to those counterfeits of joy with which the world is all too ready to cheat us. The Cross is not a gloomy thing: the only really joyous laughter in the world to-day is the laughter of St. Francis and his spiritual descendants; the only true *gaieté de cœur* is the gaiety of St. Philip Neri and his merry family.

II

And so, as Lent deepens to Passion-tide, we may discover or rediscover, the Cross, and find, hidden deep in the field of grace, the priceless pearl of sacrifice. That discovery is not made by way of intellectual enquiry, emotional expenditure, or artistic appreciation. There is only one way of really finding the Cross, and not merely looking at it, and that is *by making common cause with the crucified Lord.* This is an age that talks loudly of sympathy, and to find the Cross is to enter into a state of sympathy with Jesus Christ. But the sympathy demanded by the Cross is a very definite, distinctive, profound

thing, miles removed from the shallow sentiment which so often bears the name.

Its first expression must always be, not commiseration or companionship, but penitence. The Cross is the judgment-seat of Love, and when Love is judge, the most blameless may well abase himself in dust and ashes. The Cross of Jesus is the great tribunal of penance. Before it sentimental devotion and eloquent protestation die. The whisper of penitence is the only language fit for that great Court.

So our first contact with the Cross is made at the tribunal of penance. In approaching it we detach ourselves from the superficial, easy-going, delusive attitude of the conventional church-goer, who is content to be one of, say, three thousand "miserable offenders," and does not mind even saying so, once a week, in their company. Discarding the protection of the herd, alone with our own sin, we kneel before Almighty God in the Sacrament of Penance. We know our sin—definite, individual, characteristic—to be something that brought the Saviour to the Cross; and the only attitude possible to us, once we

see that, is humiliation, shame, sorrow, a contrition not emotional or passionate it may be, but entirely honest and humble. We ask for judgment, for correction. We do not presume, nor describe ourselves as "sympathizing" with our crucified Judge. Yet a really contrite confession is the great fundamental act of sympathy with Christ. For it means to think about sin as He did, to be of one mind with Him regarding that which gave the Cross its bitterness. Failing true penitence and humble confession, all professions of sympathy with our Lord are hollow, and the thought of suffering with Him is a pestilent delusion.

III

To the penitent there comes the call to accompany his Lord to the Cross. Our smallest acts of self-denial, the simplest Lenten rule, may be a vital moment in the history of that companionship; a lifetime of appalling austerities may fall entirely outside it. What is commonly called "asceticism" does not even begin to be Christian until its every act is offered to God in humility, contrition and love,

in union with that supreme Sacrifice which alone gives our self-denials value. Otherwise it remains, at its best, the noble violence of the seeker after God; at its worst, the loveless fanaticism of the Pharisee.

As we begin as humble learners in the way of the Cross, not blighting our imagination with a gloom that dishonours the Great Joy-bringer, yet in the seriousness of unreserved surrender, something of His suffering will inevitably fall to our share. We may not be caught up into the consuming fire of His passion, but we shall surely feel something of the chill loneliness of His endurance. We shall know loneliness among our fellows, and, perhaps most of all, among those who with us follow in the way of the Cross. Why it should be so is a perplexing problem, the roots of which strike deep into the mystery of personality, human and Divine. It certainly was so with Jesus. When He rode into Jerusalem, the Pharisees who stood by and scowled understood Him better than the crowd that sang "Hosannah." The Pharisees knew that He had come to destroy what they had built —hatred can be very clear-sighted at times.

When Jesus stood before Pilate, His enemies who cried, "Away with Him! Crucify Him!" understood Him better than the disciples who slunk away in grief and fear. The disciples looked upon Him as the Saviour of the nation, who would have restored the Kingdom of Israel had He only been strong enough to avert capture and death. The leaders of the nation recognized that He was a peril to nationalist ambitions; that, as long as He was allowed to live, they would have no chance with the people. And we may, in quite humble, homely ways, reproduce that experience; only the courage of love can bear us through.

IV

But there is a deeper loneliness—the moment when the disciple can no longer understand his Master; when, our friends having ceased to sympathize with us, the One Friend seems to turn away and leave us with our perplexity. Writers and preachers have moved us deeply again and again, as they waxed eloquent over the loneliness of the misunderstood Christ—lonely in the home at Nazareth,

lonely in the crowd, lonely among His disciples, lonely in His supreme agony; misunderstood by all, even by His most holy Mother, denied by the generous-hearted Peter, forsaken by the disciple He loved best. Nothing is wanting to complete the picture of utmost loneliness. But there is another side to that picture. If a sword pierced the heart of the forsaken Christ, did it not also pierce the heart of those who forsook Him? Was there no sword in St. Peter's heart when he heard the intolerable news of the approaching Cross, and cried out: "That be far from Thee, Lord"? Was there no sword in the heart of St. John and the others when their hopes were so inconceivably shattered, their convictions so fatally shaken?

And so there may come a time when we also shall be unable to understand Jesus Christ, when we too shall feel the loneliness of separation from Him. It comes to most of us in one form or another. Our plans are upset just when we had framed them in obedience to what we conceived to be the call of Jesus. We may become conscious of an interior demand, of something being asked

of us by God which runs entirely counter to our previous conception of His will for us. Or, perhaps, most mysterious of all, we may find ourselves unable to discern the will of God, left face to face with a silent Christ, unable to see His working in our lives, yet conscious only that an unknown Hand is shaping them into a pattern that seems to make no sense. We work, and our work is taken away from us; we love, and are left lonely; we pray, and God is silent when even His *No* would be a blessed relief; we follow Jesus along a hard road, and at great cost, and Jesus leaves us. In such hours we can only endure; it is not until they have passed that we know how entirely we have been with Jesus all the time, how deeply we have been admitted into the Divine friendship.

V

There is a further discovery of the Cross —the fellowship of Christ's sufferings for the sake of His Body, the Church. But while it too is a finding of the Cross, it belongs essentially to the fellowship of the ascended life of our Lord—to that miraculous region,

"the other side of Lent," where the soul that has kept her fast with her Lord may enter into His joy, the joy that is woven out of sorrow, the triumph that is at once ease and pain, peace and a sword.

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